

Increasing Agreement and Minimising Difference

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Most seven-day periods could fill a small book; many days might merit more than a chapter. Last Thursday I hosted the UK Air Cargo annual gathering. These freight professionals cope with the changing rules of international trade. Half their work is with international consignments outside the EU. They will cope, whether politicians make a mess of the UK separating from the EU 27 or whether we manage to use common sense in reducing the possible costs of a no-deal exit.

I refrain from comment now on parliamentary steps towards a possible December election; it makes sense to apply for a postal vote in case the weather turns bad. Thursday is the usual day, remembering when shops closed in the afternoon.

The Rail Operating Centre (ROC) at Three Bridges controls our local railway. I visited on Friday to thank all the staff there who are expert in keeping us safe and moving. Thankfully, our coastal services and the trains from London are now pretty reliable. Constituents and our schools and colleges alerted my team to the too-frequent station skipping and shortened routes. The operators now know that the protected rush hour services need to be extended to include the trains that students rely on, not just during weeks of examinations. We need to see more reliability from the massive investment in trains, signalling and in building the resilience of the old infrastructure. I also asked for action on delays at level-crossings.

That afternoon I joined the children and staff at the Goring Church of England school, speaking briefly and facing a great variety of questions. Two of them led me to reflect on the life and teachings of Jesus. I said that were I not an MP, I could have tried to be a good teacher. A group of parents and governors kindly stayed to share their dedication to working together to continued increases of base-line funding and for special needs.

On Saturday, in addition to house calls, I greeted friends and supporters at the cheerful Rustington Diwali lunch. It is good that we recognise and enjoy each other's festivals and New Years. I admired the Worthing Mayor's progress around the Assembly Hall at the Worthing CAMRA Beer Festival. The samples I tried increased my admiration for CAMRA (admission: I am a life member) and for the brewers, the cider makers and the volunteers who made the Festival a grand family occasion.

Over the weekend I planted hundreds of bulbs and we have planted a few trees. I love the succession of the seasons and it is impressive how whips and saplings can develop over a decade or two.

In Downing Street for a Monday morning with the Chancellor, I met Dilyn the Downing Street puppy racing down the stairs followed by Prime Minister Johnson. I had been present in the back garden on the day Dilyn first arrived. Such is history?

More importantly, colleagues and I with the campaigning charity Leasehold Knowledge Partnership met the officials and Housing minister who have the responsibility to help rescue many vulnerable leaseholders from exploitation and misfortune when that can be achieved. The Secretary of State later appeared to answer more questions from the Select Committee. Truly, our cross-party efforts are bringing results.

In the early evening. I served on a Statutory Instrument committee on Northern Ireland plant and animal health. One clause referred to *Aromia bunjii*. Having served in Northern Ireland as agriculture minister I thought others might like to know it is the red-necked long-horned beetle that attacks prunus trees in parts of China. One or three (accounts differ) were spotted in a pallet in Essex eleven years ago. We agreed to continue to try to keep it out on both sides of the Irish sea and on either side of the Irish border.

There are two topics about which I do not write: personal support to individual constituents and families because people can be confident on confidentiality; and controversial party politics because there is enough in the mainstream media.